

THE COST OF ENERGY PROFITS

Crippling energy costs hit poor and elderly as companies cash in on cold weather

Households across the UK are facing record energy bills this month as a result of the recent freezing weather conditions. After one of the coldest Januaries in over 25 years, average gas and electricity bills are set to rise from the usual £156 to £237 – a massive 52% increase, according to official figures, with many people falling further into debt in order to pay.

The extreme weather during the first month of 2010 saw average temperatures slip below 3°C with widespread heavy snowfall and sharp frosts across most of the UK. According to the Met Office the minimum temperature recorded was (minus) -22°C. The extraordinary weather over the winter period is estimated to have caused a 30% surge in energy consumption, as families and the elderly struggled to cope with the freezing temperatures.

Economically it means the UK's 27 million households will pay out a total of £6.1 billion on their energy bills for last month, an increase of £1.89 billion despite the decrease in the cost of fuel. Wholesale gas prices fell by 60% during 2008–09, but the savings have not

page 3 ►►

LENS CAP THE END OF AN ERA



Large scale steel manufacturing comes to a halt on Teesside with the mothballing of the giant Tata Corus steelworks and the loss of 1,700 jobs. Tata Corus is the world's fifth-largest steel group, producing 25 million tons a year with revenue last year of \$32 billion dollars.

CONSTRUCTION BLACKLIST PROTEST

Scores of protestors turned out on Tuesday 18th February in support of Steve Acheson, the sacked electrician and trade union activist fighting against the construction industry blacklist at Fiddlers Ferry power station, just off the M62 near Widnes. He was unfairly dismissed from the site in 2008 as a direct result of the blacklist and has mounted a picket outside the plant ever since. On 8th February he was confronted by company security and police who filmed him and confiscated his banner for being 'offensive' to the site operators Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE).

As a response, Tuesday's protest was organised by Warrington trades council to send a message to SSE that any attempt at harassment or intimidation would not end

Steve's protest but would instead strengthen the support for him that has built up over the last 14 months. Over 30 supporters assembled beneath the cooling towers and hung their banners on the perimeter fence. They then went to the main gates where they handed out leaflets to power station workers explaining their case.

SSE had previously sought a high court injunction against Acheson under the Terrorism Act which, as reported in *Freedom*, was thrown out by the judge for having no legal basis and was "bordering on the paranoid".

The blacklist became public in July last year after a court case revealed the controversial database which had the names and details of hundreds of construction workers known to be militants, activists or 'troublemakers'.

INSIDE ►►

High Court bans strike page 3

The coup in Niger page 7

John Rety obituary pages 8 and 9

Readers' letters page 11

A Greek tragedy page 13

Reviews pages 14 and 15

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

POLICE: A crackdown on drink-fuelled violence across Greater Manchester has seen 395 people arrested after a 24-hour blitz by police.

Operation Portcullis started early on Friday 19th February with a series of raids aimed at tracking down those suspected of drink-fuelled crime.

Throughout the night officers said they 'locked down' Manchester city centre to stop people carrying weapons. Two 'cannabis farms' and a shotgun with 50 live cartridges were found. Two men were arrested on suspicion of rape, and more than 40 young people were referred to youth agencies.

A 'lock down' in police terms is when officers control where people can go in a certain area in response to a specific risk, hazard or threat.

SCOTLAND: Anti-racism campaigners staged a demonstration and march through the centre of Edinburgh on the 21st February. It was arranged in response to a threatened protest by the Scottish Defence League (SDL) – a right-wing group claiming to oppose Islamic militancy.

The anti-fascist protesters attempted to enter a bar opposite the Scottish Parliament where they believed members of the SDL had gathered. Police moved in to keep the opposing groups apart.

The protesters said members of the SDL were inside Jenny Ha's bar at the bottom of the Royal Mile. Activists waving banners and placards tried to get into the pub but were kept back by police officers who sealed off the surrounding area.

Student protester James Nesbitt, 23, from Glasgow, said: "We had spotters out across the city looking for fascists in pubs. We got here quickly but the police are doing everything they can to keep us away from them."

"We're here because people are frightened with the developments in the far-right."

Lawyer Aamer Anwar said that the march would serve as a warning to the SDL to "stay away".

Another of the organisers, Osama Saeed of the Scottish-Islamic Foundation, said: "Today is a further humiliation for the SDL. They only got ten minutes in the rain last November in Glasgow. They didn't even get that today."

WALES: Police are hunting robbers who broke into a security firm depot which transfers money by van and stole a four-figure sum made up of coins.

The incident happened at Newport and those responsible are believed to have used three vehicles.

Gwent Police said the Loomis UK depot, which was formerly owned by Securitas, in Queensway Meadows Industrial Estate was targeted on Friday evening.

Police are appealing for information about the robbery. So if you see any coins lying about...

LENS CAP WOL



Our learned readers will require no reminder that the collective noun for owls is a parliament. Which is interesting because what sort of parliament you have makes as much difference to working class people as what type of owl eats you does to a mouse. Therefore there will be no prize whatsoever for the first person to text in (07913 865 928) identifying this species of owl.

Editorial

It's been a bleak beginning to the year 2010. Not only has January been the coldest in over twenty years, right in the middle of a global recession and continuing financial crisis, but we have lost, in quick succession, some of the greatest political minds, radical thinkers and inspired anarchist comrades of our time.

Both Anna Mendelssohn and Jake Prescott died within months of each other and, while both had retired from the political scene, their actions and activities during their time in the Angry Brigade brought a certain dynamism and daring to anarchist politics, not witnessed before or since, and raised the bar in terms of how we confront the state. Howard Zinn, who for many a young anarchist was the introduction to a new way of thinking – the original politics from below – with his seminal *A People's History of the United States*. The scope, clarity and sheer magnitude of his work still cast a long and impressive shadow across the political spectrum despite his untimely demise.

The most recent deaths of John Rety and Colin Ward perhaps resonate most with *Freedom* and its readership. Both contributed enormously to the paper, *Freedom* publishing and to the anarchist movement in general. It is a testament to both that their works

still play an important role in our political thinking. They were great men whose commitment and fearless passion for anarchism was informed by their humanity and desire for a better world.

How anarchists treat their comrades in both life and in death will always reflect, in microcosm, the society we wish to see develop. It is a great shame that neither man will have the opportunity to see that society come into being. It is up to us to ensure their lives were not lived out in vain. *Freedom* as a paper, as a publishers and as a bookshop continues to provide the traditions that both Colin Ward and John Rety so ably contributed to.

With general and local elections looming it will become the job of anarchists to ensure the spectre of capitalism and the state doesn't monopolise the discourse, and that our ideas become relevant and necessary, and most importantly heard, above the clatter of clashing ideologies. Social change can never be mediated through the very institutions that are actively preventing that change. As such *Freedom* is compiling an 'election special' in the run up to the general election. We need to reclaim the agenda and express anarchism as a real and achievable goal. John and Colin, I'm sure, wouldn't have it any other way.



High court bans strike action

Judge's ruling allows employers to stop workers striking

A disturbing new trend is emerging in industrial disputes with the willingness of the courts to directly intervene on the side of the bosses in preventing strike action by unions. The latest example of this is the management of Milford Haven port (pictured above) in South Wales who have successfully secured a High Court injunction against a 48-hour strike by 50 harbour pilots and launch crew. The strike by workers, over changes to their pension scheme, was due to go ahead on 18th February, but the court issued sanctions against the union for not following correct procedure, ruling that notices of industrial action proposed by Unite did not fully comply with the 1992 Trade Union Act.

Unite has now issued the required seven

days notice that the workers, who play an essential role in navigating large vessels, including gas and oil tankers, safely into port, will stage a 12-hour strike on 23rd February. They will also start an overtime ban and work-to-rule starting on the same day. The port employers want to introduce changes to their pension scheme, final salary, and retirement age.

The implications are both clear and alarming – using the courts to prevent the right of workers to withhold their labour, where the High Court plays an active role in trade union disputes. The strike itself was not unlawful, but the judge, in this case Mr Justice Sweeney, used the Trade Union and Labour Relations Consolidation Act, as a legal tactic to impose a temporary injunction on behalf of the port authorities under the spurious ‘balance of convenience’.

The number of injunctions under the Act has nearly trebled over the past year after London bus operator Metrobus won their case

in 2008 claiming a strike ballot was unlawful due to polling irregularities. British Airways followed suit, putting a similar case to the courts to secure an injunction that overturned a 92% majority vote on an 80% turnout. The law courts are now seen as a useful political tool in challenging the action of striking workers.

Milford Haven is Britain's sixth biggest port, handling a quarter of the UK's petrol and diesel, with two oil refineries, two natural gas terminals and the UK's largest petroleum tank farm. In 2009 it announced increased profits for third consecutive year in the busiest 12 months in its 50-year history handling its largest ever amount of shipping, a record 52.8 million gross tons.

Unite's national secretary for docks and waterways, said: “The fundamental issue here is the High Court intervening yet again, as they did in the BA cabin crew dispute, to undermine our members' democratic decision to take industrial action.”

The cost of energy profits

◀ page 1

been passed on to consumers with customer bills being reduced by less than 10%. Critics argue that the major energy suppliers are waiting until the summer to bring down prices rather than risk a cut in profits during the peak energy consumption over the winter months.

The UK's largest energy supplier, British Gas with 15.7million customers, is set for a 50% rise in annual profits to more than £500 million, while Scottish and Southern Energy's profits rose by 36% in the past six months. Thousands of elderly, meanwhile, have been unable to afford to keep warm during the coldest spell in 30 years.

On energy expert commented: “There is still scope for significant price cuts for both gas and electricity to ease the burden on hard-pressed households. A lot of people, especially the old, poor and vulnerable, were already struggling to pay their bills even before the sharp drop in temperatures and they need help.”

There were 36,700 more deaths among the elderly last winter than in warmer months, according to the Office of National Statistics. This was up 12,000 on the previous year. At the same time, there are millions of pensioners among the 5.4 million who are in fuel poverty. The Age Concern and Help the Aged charities

condemned the rise in winter deaths, which it links to “cash-strapped older people turning down the heating”.

Energy watchdog group Consumer Focus commented: “All of the suppliers will be enjoying rocketing profits while millions of consumers worry about how to afford to keep warm”.

The windfall for gas and electric companies comes on the back of an the energy regulators Ofgem report that found energy suppliers waiting 65 days after putting up prices before informing customers of the increase, leaving many in the dark over the true cost of their energy consumption.

ANALYSIS

Anarchists in action

The recent Anarchist Federation delegate meeting, their future plans and their ongoing activities.

The National Delegate Meeting of the Anarchist Federation (AF) took place on 30th and 31st January in Glasgow, attended by 35 members. This was a sign of the increasing strength and vigour of the Federation. Those present were from: Aberdeen, Brighton/Portsmouth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds, Lincoln, London, Manchester, Merseyside, Nottingham, Sheffield and Stirling/Dunblane. Apologies were received from East Kent, Bristol, Hereford and Norwich.

The Edinburgh AF, which was set up in the middle of last year, gave its first group report and described its activities carried out by the nine members there. It has produced three issues of a support sheet for Edinburgh Council manual workers called the *Edinburgh Muckraker*. Forthcoming events organised by the comrades include a one-day Film Festival on 20th March.

Merseyside and Sheffield followed with details of their activities. Both groups are growing and Sheffield continues to produce its local newsheet, *The Fargate Speaker*, and has been involved in setting up an Unemployed Workers Group. (As well as the *Edinburgh Muckraker* and the *Fargate Speaker*, Hereford AF have been involved in producing a fine local newsheet, the *Hereford Heckler*, over the last few years). They have set up a discussion group with the Commune group and are organising a bookfair in May.

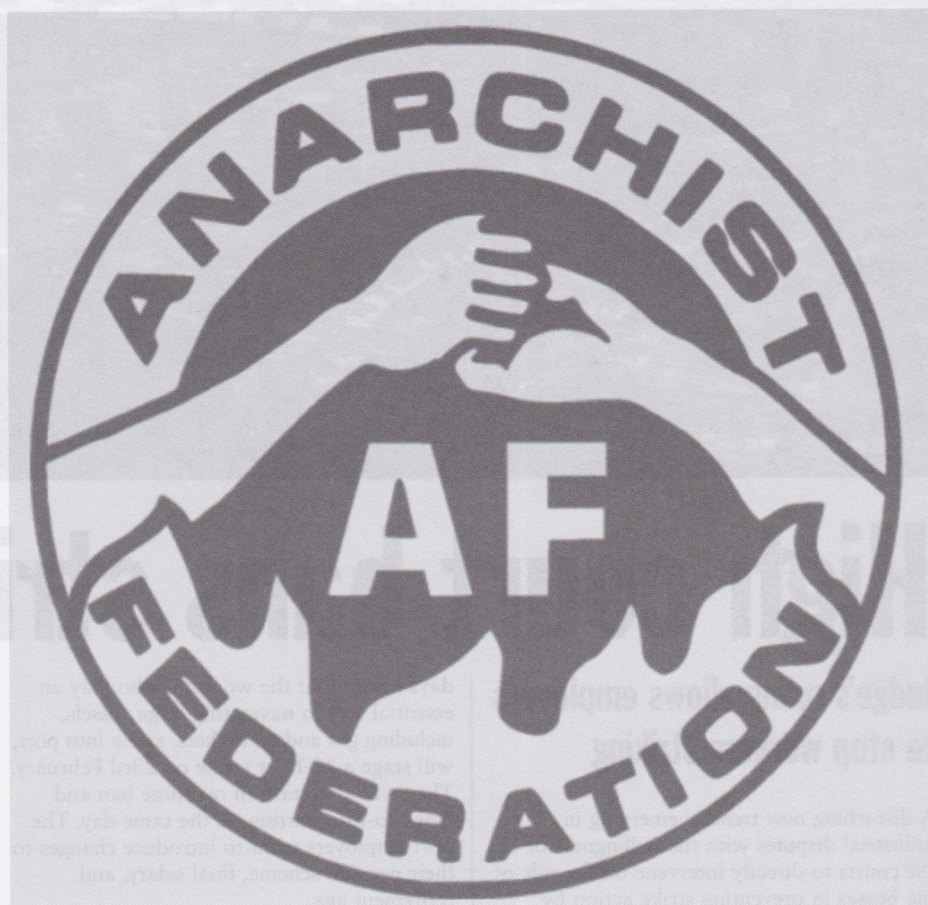
Manchester reported on its propaganda activities, the setting up of a discussion group and its publishing venture, Peterloo Press, which has produced a range of fine pamphlets.

Nottingham talked of their work with the Sparrow's Nest Library a valuable resource set up by the AF. Brighton described their work around resistance to cuts at Sussex University and around EDO.

Glasgow is well established with eight core members and is involved in propaganda activities including regular street distributions of the AF monthly newsheet *Resistance* and activities against cuts.

Leeds has ten members. It supported the refuse workers strike in Leeds and was involved in the occupation of an empty school and a campaign to turn it into a community centre.

London has regular street distributions of *Resistance* – it maintains several every month – and some of its members are active in a local community group Action East End and in the London Education Workers Group. A series of public meetings introduced anarchist ideas to a new audience and one person has



joined the AF as a result. London AF hopes to be setting up a new group in South London soon. New groups have been set up in Aberdeen and Hull and Stirling. A youth caucus has been formed within the AF and two AF educationals are planned in March in Newcastle and Bristol.

The meeting deliberated over the effective internal life of the AF and its forthcoming National Conference and Summer Camp, on a levy for international work and an International Solidarity Fund and on propaganda and activities. There was a lively, interesting and fruitful discussion on the nature of the English Defence League, as well as a report and discussion on our international work within the International of Anarchist Federations and in contact work in Latin America and Africa. The organisation of bookfairs by the AF in Manchester and Sheffield were also discussed. The overall atmosphere was positive and friendly with a growing confidence that we are putting down roots and are a growing organisation.

Canterbury: A speaker from London AF spoke at a packed meeting (40 people in attendance) on an introduction to anarchism at Canterbury University in January, organised by the Socialist and Anarchist Societies there with the help of East Kent AF. The talk was well received with a lively question and answer session afterwards.

Oxford: A speaker from London AF spoke at a meeting on Anarchism and the Environmental Crisis at a meeting convened by Oxford Autonomous Forum on 13th February with a good discussion afterwards. It was preceded by a distribution of *Resistance* in Oxford city centre.

London: Members attended and distributed leaflets at the Photographers rally in Trafalgar Square in January against the use of anti-terrorism stop and search powers to harass photographers and prevent them taking pictures. The full text can be seen on the website.

Publications: To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of non-payment of the Poll Tax in England and Wales (following non-registration in 1989 and solid mass non-payment in Scotland), to remember the commitment of community campaigns who supported each other in non-payment, and to take inspiration from the great Poll Tax Riot in London on 31st March 1990 and smaller uprisings in many local areas, the AF have republished all the *Organise!* magazine articles over the period 1988–1991 spanning ten issues.

People interested in getting involved in the AF should contact their nearest local group, which can be found on the website, <http://www.afed.org.uk/>

IN BRIEF

SHELL TO SEA: Over 50 Shell to Sea campaigners protested the recent jailing of 52 year old Erris fisherman Pat O'Donnell for resisting Shell's experimental gas pipeline at Rosspport, County Mayo. Pat received a seven month sentence for his part in attempting to block the line.

The Rosspport campaigners write: "We've had a busy winter, with the continued dragging out of Shell's onshore pipeline application, court appearances and the excellent wind power course held last month. The summer promises to be very busy with Shell planning massive work in the bay and the estuary. The last week has been tough, with the jailing of local fisherman Pat O'Donnell for seven months for convictions arising from protest against the Corrib Gas project. Pat has been instrumental in opposing the project, upholding his fishing rights and refusing to be bought off by Shell. He has suffered for his stance: threats, assault, character assassination, damage and theft of property, false arrest and imprisonment, attempted murder at sea, and now incarceration. Write in support to Pat: Pat O'Donnell, Castlereagh Prison, Harristown, Castlereagh, County Roscommon. Or you can email the camp at rossportsolidaritycamp@gmail.com and we will pass on your messages of support. If you would like to distribute an A4 sized poster in support of Pat O'Donnell contact Betty at kilcommonlodge@eircom.net We'll put all posters and flyers in support of the chief up on shelltosea.com as soon as we can."

LOCAL FOOD: Are you interested in finding some space to grow food? Spitalfields City Farm in east London is regaining land from Transport for London following the disruptions caused by the new East London Line extension. They would like hear from local residents who want space to grow food and are interested in forming a growing group and supporting and encouraging the local community to use this space as a community garden.

If you are interested or want to find out more, there is an initial meeting on 27th March at 12pm to discuss what we can do. To find out more, contact Laura at gardens@spitalfieldscityfarm.org or call 020 7247 8762.

MOON MISSION: Comrades may have noticed the debate on space travel on the blog of well known anarchist and regular *Freedom* contributor Ian Bone.

Here at *Freedom* we stand firmly behind the constructive and safe use of technology for the benefit of the working class. Indeed we see the scientific method as a necessary tool for human progress, but we don't blindly follow that all technical improvement leads to progress. Dynamite doesn't give the world more liberty just because it's more powerful than gunpowder. But what do our readers think of a people's lunar expeditionary force?

Economic analysis

The banks

On 9th February, John Varley, chief executive to Barclays, met a Treasury Select Committee of MPs. During that meeting, he insisted that regular savers' money, deposited with his bank, was not used to support its investment activities. In connection with Barclays Capital in the US, he said that President Obama's plans to stop US banks doing the same thing, were therefore "inconsequential and completely irrelevant (to Barclays)".

Varley's statement made me feel that maybe I had overstated my case, made in previous commentaries, for the separation of the two components of the banking industry. However, assuming that the banks had borrowed, and not used depositors' money directly, they would have used it to cover speculative losses, had the banks been liquidated after the crash. Instead, the state intervened to bail out all of the banks' activities.

In the aftermath of the crash, the banks knew that breaking up their operations was a serious possibility, but that seems to be fading here, if not in the US. Whether Obama will succeed in forcing through meaningful legislation is open to doubt; here in the UK nothing like that is on the agenda. But there is speculation that if the Tories get back in, they will get rid of Mervyn King, the present Governor of the Bank of England, who still champions breaking up the banks.

The banks have our money, the months roll by, there is only talk of forcing them to increase their liquidity (how?), and to make 'living wills' to facilitate their going under again. Whatever else they do with our money, I think they want to keep retail banking to

facilitate blackmailing the state for more bail-outs, if and when that becomes necessary. Having done it once, they think they can do it again. It's getting to feel like the bankers are back in control.

The mutuals

With the spotlight very much on the banks, there is little attention paid to the building societies. But they too have their troubles after over-extending themselves during the property boom, with loans over 100% of purchase price, and allowing self-certified mortgages. All of the building societies have lost their AAA credit ratings.

The Chelsea Building Society, also victims of a mortgage fraud and investments in Iceland, are merging with the Yorkshire Building Society. Nationwide has taken over the Cheshire, Derbyshire and Dunfermline societies. Skipton has absorbed the Barnsley and Scarborough. The Co-op has merged with the Britannia Building Society, changing the status of the latter to a mutual bank. As with the banks, we've landed up with fewer organisations made even larger, more centralisation and less accountability.

Brown claimed able to control the housing market, but if he was serious, he would legislate to limit borrowing relative to the mortgages' income. Now it's too late: banks and building societies need to keep their lending high to avoid further negative equity. Nationwide currently require a 15% deposit, but you can still get 4.1-times your salary – it was only three-times when I took on a mortgage 30 years ago.

John Griffin



INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: The UN has snubbed Nato by refusing to engage in its 'militarised' rebuilding strategy for Marjah, the area which has been the latest victim of US Shock and Awe treatment.

The organisation said army-based short-term aid would do little to endear the population.

Robert Watkins, a special representative of UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon, said: "We will not be part of that military strategy".

BELGIUM: rail-workers organised strikes across the country in mid-February after a fatal crash yesterday which left 18 people, including the train driver, dead. Machinists and technical workers blockaded depots across the country against cuts to the services which they say contributed to the crash.

BELGIUM: Striking workers occupied Total's refinery in Dunkerque on 16th February after management refused to meet an ultimatum over negotiations. At least 150 workers stormed the buildings, forcing their way past security guards and at one point used ladders to gain entry to the offices on the higher levels of the buildings.

Workers at the site have been on strike since 12th January over fears that a temporary closure of the plant would become permanent.

CANADA: Guillaume Joseph-Marc Beaulieu, 27, of Vancouver, has been arrested as the ringleader of up to 300 black bloc anarchists who rioted in the city in protests against the Winter Olympics on 14th February. He faces fines of over \$5,000.

GERMANY: Anti-fascist protesters prevented neo-nazis from rallying in Dresden on 13th February. Around 10,000 people joined hands to create a human chain protecting the city centre from an estimated 6,500 right-wing extremists from across Europe who had convened for a 'mourning march'.

MALAYSIA: Amnesty International has called on the Malaysian government to end caning after three women were subjected to the punishment following their conviction for extramarital sex. This is the first time women have been subjected to caning in Malaysia.

PHILIPPINES: Greenpeace activists in have called for justice from Japan's government in the case of two colleagues who were arrested in Japan in 2008 for anti-whaling activities.

Junichi Sato and Toru Suzuki were in the process of exposing a corruption scandal in the taxpayer-funded whaling programme when they were arrested.

SYRIA: A Syrian writer was arrested early last month after she wrote a novel that describes the political situation in the country during the 1990s. Raghdah Hassan has been held incommunicado since she was seized on the Syrian side of the Al'Arida border crossing with Lebanon on 10th February.

LENS CAP FRANCE



Photograph: calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com

Police prowl around the Krondstadt Hangar, a space rented by Calais No Borders activists as a safe haven for migrants. The building was re-opened in mid-February after a violent raid which saw the police blockade, and then evict, the legally-run building to get at refugees who were being given aid and shelter.

Belgrade Six bailed

Six Serbian anarchists charged with committing acts of international terrorism were overjoyed when they were granted bail, amid rumours that the state case was collapsing around its ears.

Hundreds turned out for a hearing on 17th February at which Tadej Kurepa, Ivan Vulović, Sanja Dojkić, Ratibor Trivunac, Ivan Savic and Nikola Mitrovic, had been accused of attacking the Greek Embassy in Belgrade.

But after intense international scrutiny and the intervention of prominent Serbian academics, who accused Serbian President Boris Tadic of politically charging the trial, the six were released until a new hearing on 23rd March.

Emerging to a hero's welcome, they were later informed the state was also likely to drop their charges to a far lesser offence.

The six were first detained on 4th September after a Molotov cocktail broke a window at the Greek Embassy in Belgrade.

Originally arrested for 'causing general public danger', an allegation often associated with low-level vandalism, the activists' charges were upped to international terrorism following public comments by Serbian President Boris Tadic that he intended to crack down on 'left-wing terrorism'.

All of the six detainees are activists in or associates of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative (ASI), the Serbian section of the International Workers' Association (IWA). The ASI is part of a growing, independent union movement in Serbia and supporters say this is a political trial aimed at derailing that growth.

The Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative had repeatedly declared that they knew nothing of the attack or the group that carried it out.

Notes from the United States

Five jailed US citizens said last month that they had been tortured after their arrest on terror charges nearly two months earlier in Pakistan. The five young men were accused of seeking to join groups to fight US troops in Afghanistan. They were arrested after their families reported them missing in northern Virginia.

Meanwhile the total number of civilians killed inside Pakistan by US drone (unstaffed fighter planes) in January was 123. The murder of children and non-combatants by

US forces in Afghanistan in their latest offensive continues daily.

The current administration acknowledged in early February that it's continuing a policy from Bush's years which kills US citizens abroad of whom it disapproves. Dennis Blair, Director of National Intelligence, confirmed in a testimony to congress that, "Being a US citizen will not spare an American from getting assassinated by military or intelligence operatives overseas if the individual is working

The coup in Niger

The recent coup in Niger, which has seen the country put under a dusk-til-dawn curfew and installed a new military government, may have had French influences and has led to fears for the future of its economy and environment.

Rebel troops stormed President Mamadou Tandja's offices on 18th February on the pretext of 'restoring democracy' after he attempted to bring a referendum which would have removed term limits for his administration.

However the attack, in which ten people were killed and Tandja was captured, is suspected to have been covertly backed by Paris as it seeks to secure resources for its nuclear programme, which provides 80% of France's power.

Led by Salou Djibo, the takeover took place just a day after US President Barack Obama announced a new economic stimulus package for the American nuclear industry worth £5.3 billion and amidst rising concerns that Tandja was flirting with Chinese mining companies.

Niger, the third largest uranium producer in the world, had until last year provided a near-monopoly for French companies, primarily Areva CI, but had recently been ousted in some areas by the China National Uranium Corp.

Tandja had been a key figure in the switch-over, as his family members control posts in the procurement and negotiating of uranium exploration and exploitation throughout Niger.

Efforts by his administration to bring competition into the country's mining industry, potentially increasing his and his family's take, represented a serious threat to French interests in the event of a US turn towards nuclear power.

Notes from the Unites States

◀ page 6

with terrorists and planning to attack fellow Americans."

This came shortly after the *Washington Post* reported that at least three US citizens are on 'hit lists' kept by the CIA and the Joint Special Operations Command. For example, the US-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki is accused of, but not confirmed as having involvement in, the failed airline bombing on Christmas Day last year and the shooting event at Fort Hood.

As journalist Glenn Greenwald, constitutional law attorney and legal blogger at Salon.com who's researched this issue extensively, says, "You're talking about the worst elements of the [Bush era] policies, but even more extreme. You're talking about American citizens not being merely wiretapped by the President with no oversight, but murdered, assassinated, killed, based solely on the unchecked say-so of the President ... look at how many times over the past decade that the administration – both first the Bush administration, then the Obama administration – has accused people



Niger's spokesman for the new military government making a statement in Niamey

With that turn taking place on 17th February and Britain making noises about following suit, France has been faced with the prospect of being squeezed financially from all sides if it loses Niger from its sphere of influence.

Niger's mineral wealth is in stark contrast to the poverty of most of the population, which mostly survives on subsistence agriculture and has been hit hard by famines and locust swarms in recent years.

One result of this disparity has, according to NGOs active in the region, seen uranium mining concerns run roughshod over international environmental and humanitarian standards.

Greenpeace said in a November 2009 briefing that it had "found dangerous levels

of radiation in the streets of Akokan".

The findings noted: "In front of Akokan hospital the levels of radiation were up to 100 times higher than normal background levels. The source of the radiation was radioactive waste rock from the mines that had been used for road construction." In other spots, it was up to 500 times.

Affected Tuareg communities in the mining regions have become increasingly angry, saying not only are they being poisoned, but any revenues are being stolen away by the mining concerns and Niger government, a situation which led to armed conflict in 2007.

Continuing control from the west using military involvement is likely to continue this trend indefinitely.

More occupations by sans-papiers

Undocumented workers in France are continuing to occupy workplaces as public figures continue to sign up in support of their plight.

Last month 250 strikers at Street View occupied company offices on the Rue du Regard in Paris and, as *Freedom* went to press, were vowing to stay until they are kicked out. If police evict them from the site, it will be the fifth time the workforce has been sacked en masse in the last six months.

The wave of occupations by sans-papier (undocumented) workers, which went nationwide in October of last year, have enjoyed an unprecedented level of solidarity from public figures. More than 260 celebrities, political, scientific and trade unionist figures have now signed up to a pledge that in the event of further occupations they will rush to the scene.

Many sans-papiers have now been in the country for ten years or more, yet are denied basic working rights.

Louis Further

OBITUARY

Remembering John Rety ... 'Th

John Rety, chessplayer, *Freedom* editor, novelist, poet, publisher, painter, pacifist and lifelong anarchist and activist, has died at the age of 79. John confessed in a radio interview in 2008 that he became aware of anarchism “quite late, really – I must have been 13 or 14”. This was during the last year of the Second World War, in occupied Budapest, when John’s father was confined to a camp. John himself was a courier for hidden Jewish families scattered around the city, and perhaps also for the anti-fascist resistance. While his parents survived, John’s beloved grandmother was shot dead on the final day of the war, after telling a soldier that he could put his gun down, now that it was all over.

One of John’s first postwar political acts was to write and perform an anti-war play on the steps of the Hungarian parliament. This alarmed his family, who arranged a visa for him to visit London in 1947. John was then informed by his aunt that his passport had been burnt, stranding him. Fittingly for an anarchist, John was for almost his entire adult life a stateless person.

In the early 1950s, John became “one of the genuine movers and shakers” of 1950s London, in the words of collaborator John Pilgrim. John’s magazines *Intimate Review*, *Cheshire Cat* and *Fortnightly* were key parts of Soho life, publishing major literary figures such as Doris Lessing and Colin Wilson (first published by John). Pilgrim was sent to report on the Malatesta Club in Holborn for *Intimate Review* in 1954 as “it is rumoured that anarchists go there”. Both Johns then became involved in the anarchist scene.



The editor

Contrary to lingering rumours, there is abundant evidence that John was a *Freedom* editor in the 1960s. Neil Collins, who helped fold *Freedom* every week in the mid-1960s, remembers John’s “ebullience” fondly. Class War founder Ian Bone paid this affectionate tribute: “John Rety was the first anarchist I ever met and therefore directly responsible for everything! For me he was the best editor of *Freedom*. Our movement has suffered a sad loss – a very fine, honest, funny, steadfast human being has died.”

Wynford Hicks, now a distinguished journalist, was in the 1960s part of the Syndicalist Workers Federation and the Notting Hill Anarchist Group, both highly critical of *Freedom*. He recalls: “When John became one of the editors [of *Freedom*] he suggested that I write a column, which I did for about 18 months (from the autumn of 1967 to the spring of 1969).” Called ‘Fifth column’, the title gave Hicks “a licence to be subversive (i.e. disagree with what other *Freedom* contributors wrote)”. This inclusiveness was the hallmark of *Freedom* under John’s editorship: “John was the least sectarian anarchist I ever met: he just couldn’t see the point of the divisions that seemed so important to other people.”

Anarchist poet Jeff Cloves recalls *Freedom* having “more verve” and being “less puritanical” under John’s editorship – “contributors liked John because he was quite liberal about what he put in”.

In an interview with Ian Bone, John explained his policy: “I just printed everything that people sent.”

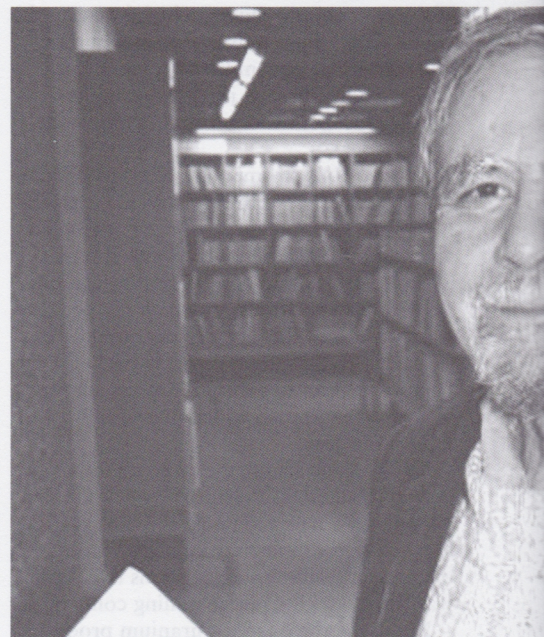
John visited Scotland and other places, and invited critics of *Freedom* to take responsibility for the paper: “The Scottish [group] had an issue once every month, it went in rotation.”

The activist

Sylvie Edwards, who was involved with *Freedom Press* through the 1990s, remembers John as being “a real anarchist – he didn’t just write about things, he also got out there; everything that I went to, John was there.”

Longtime peace activist Ernest Rodker says that his “abiding memory, even after so many years” is of John, “in heroic mode”, being “one of the first to burst through the heavy police cordon surrounding Grosvenor Square” at the famous anti-Vietnam War demonstration at the US Embassy on 27th October 1968.

In his memoirs *Bash The Rich*, Ian Bone recalls the night before the demonstration: “John Rety – who was the editor of *Freedom* at the time – was debating with Tariq Ali why we should go to the Embassy and not the picnic in the park... The room was packed out and Rety looked an especially romantic figure with his beard and red and black neckerchief. He was the only anarchist



John Rety; below left, reading at Torriano in 2008;

anyone had heard of and gave Ali a good sneering run for his money.”

John was prominent in the anarchist movement at that time – he appeared on television at least once as ‘an anarchist’, and he was the prime organiser of the Anarchist Ball in Fulham Town Hall on 1st April 1966.

Asked about the Grosvenor Square demonstration, which became a fierce physical confrontation with the police. John once said: “I’m not terribly fond of violence. I think that violence means that we have lost the argument.” He chose instead to focus on an event in nearby Speakers’ Corner, a 13-person 13-day fast to end the Vietnam War that he participated in.

John was involved in Speakers’ Corner in the 1960s, and, briefly, in the 1980s. Philip Sansom described John in his 1977 essay on Speakers’ Corner as “practically the last of the [London Anarchist] ‘group’ speakers”, noting that John was “an amusing speaker with whom the crowd felt it easy to relate”.

One of John’s less amusing commitments during the 1960s was his role in defending Stuart Christie, who was arrested in Spain in August 1964 carrying explosives for an attempted assassination of Franco, Fascist dictator of Spain. After an international solidarity campaign, Christie was released in September 1967 (but his accomplice Fernando Carballo Blanco was not). John was a driving force in the Christie-Carballo committee, initially convinced by Christie’s protestations of innocence. Later, in his long elegiac poem ‘Song of Anarchy’, John wrote: “That was the day my friend went to Spain, / Love and peace, I said and patience / Look around you, this is our world / Be patient, trust in your comrades / Do nothing in secret conclaves / Anarchists have no secrets / His young face

OBITUARY

the point is this'



below right, at Speakers' Corner in the 1980s.

Later, in the 1990s, John returned to *Freedom*, writing a column entitled 'Through The Anarchist Press' (published as a book by Freedom Press in 1996).

The poet

In the interval between his two engagements with *Freedom*, chess and poetry became central parts of John's life. His highest FIDE rating this century was 2034, and he played chess for England several times in the European Senior Team Championship.

John's involvement in poetry developed after he turned from supporting squatters to becoming one himself, taking over a semi-derelict building at 99 Torriano Avenue, Kentish Town, in 1981. This building, initially without gas or electricity, was gradually transformed into an extraordinary community arts centre. Torriano Meeting House was the base for Hearing Eye publications, through which John and his life partner since 1958, Susan Johns, have published over 150 poetry books, many of them illustrated by their daughter Emily Johns, featuring an astonishing

array of poets. Some poets to perform at Torriano included John Heath-Stubbs, Stephen Spender and Adrian Mitchell.

Hearing Eye poet Hylda Sims reflects on John's capacity to persuade people – often notable people – to contribute to his initiatives – generally for free: "John and Susan have lived their lives as true anarchists. They haven't cared about money, and it shines out. John truly lived the life of the proper anarchist: he was fundamentally uncommercial and people sensed that, and people trusted him."

John Rety (8th December 1930 – 3rd February 2010), leaves behind partner Susan Johns, daughter Emily Johns, and son Jacob Rety.

Milan Rai

There will be a celebration of John's life at 6pm, Friday 19th March, at the Artworkers' Guild, 6, Queen Square, London WC1N 3AT (nearest tube Russell Square).

Ian Bone's Resonance FM interview with John is available on YouTube at <http://tinyurl.com/john-rety-resonance>

was a grin from ear to ear / Trust me John and he sang me a song / And I never felt so cheated so betrayed / It took me ten years to drop out / But drop out I did."

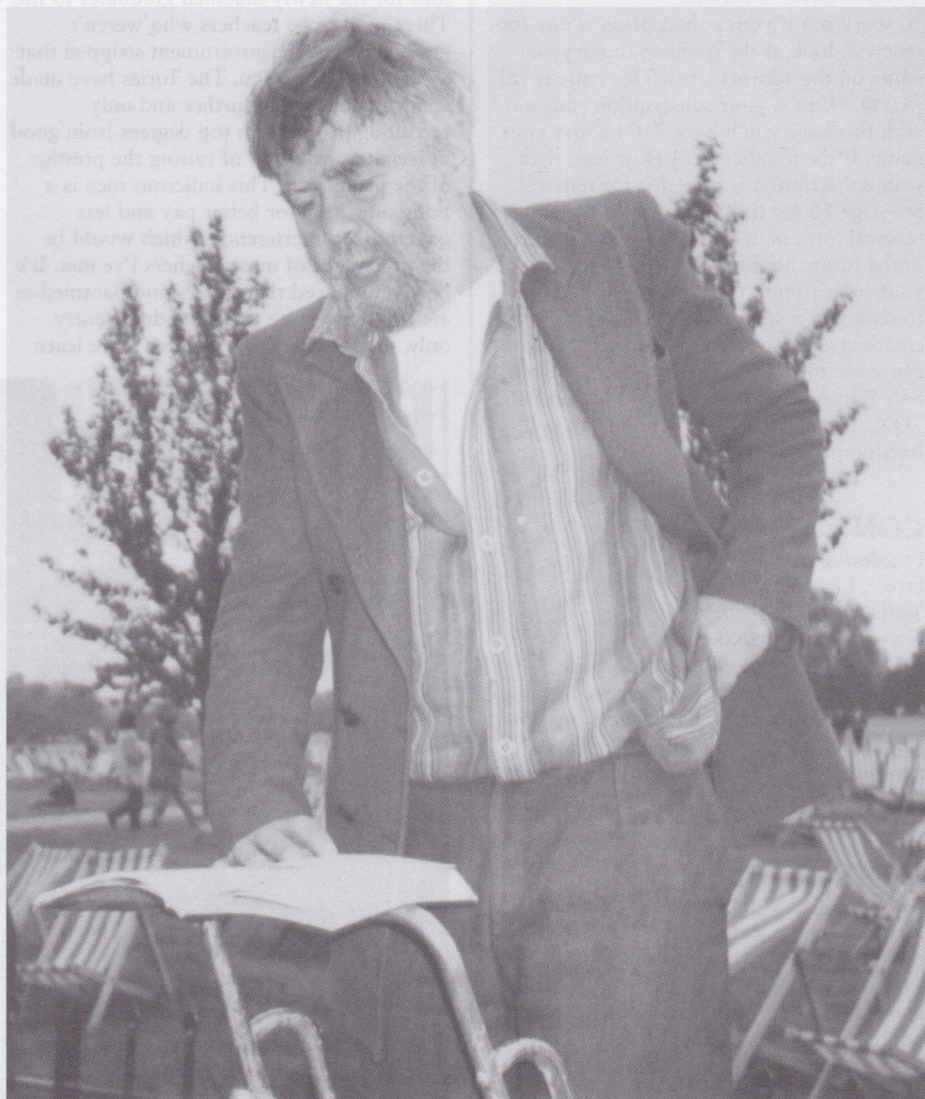
Despite his personal feelings after learning the truth, John was a committed campaigner for Christie's release. John Pilgrim, press officer for the Christie-Carballo committee, recalls: "Rety said he was going off to the *Observer*. He was one of the scruffiest people I'd ever seen. The fact is he got the best coverage of the lot, a two-page spread." Christie credits the British press coverage as a major factor in his release.

In the 1960s, John was also passionately campaigning against French nuclear tests in the Pacific, hence the publication of the Freedom-connected pamphlet *Liberty, Equality & Radioactivity*, with a lovely cover by Arthur Moyse. This 1966 pamphlet drew together contributions from a variety of political perspectives including the Independent Labour Party. The contributors' section states: "Jack Robinson and John Rety are editors of *Freedom*."

A 10th June 1966 invoice for the cover is still among John's papers (this is actually the only way of dating the pamphlet). Also among John's papers are many letters from actual or potential contributors to *Freedom* discussing articles or columns that John had published or might publish.

It is clear that John was indeed one of the editors of *Freedom*, along with Jack Robinson and Pete Turner, probably from 1964 to 1969, as he himself recalled.

John had initially been invited to join the editorial group (by Philip Sansom) on the basis of his journalistic experience. Interestingly, "Nobody asked me if I knew anything about anarchism".



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

We have instituted a regular 'clean up Monday' session to try to get the meeting room upstairs in a fit state for the first Freedom Art Exhibition which has been planned for April. Atheism willing, we will be ready for some of Donald Rooum's work to be displayed in all its glory. So if you're around the Whitechapel area any Monday afternoon, do please pop in and lend a hand – you may even be rewarded with a free book!

Speaking of books, we're extremely happy to report that, after a rather flat January, sales in February have shown an upturn and prosperity, like Napoleon, will doubtless return with the violets.

By the time this reaches you we will have had a benefit gig for Polish anarchist Rafal Gorski (on 26th February). Our apologies to all those who would have wanted to come to the benefit, but it was called at very short notice in order to raise some desperately needed money for his cancer treatment and related costs. All our best wishes go with him.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

To work out if your subscription is due for renewal, look at the number above your name on the address label. This issue is vol 71, no 04, so if your subscription runs out with this issue you'll have 7104 above your name. If the number is 7104 or less, then your subscription is now due for renewal. See page 16 for the current rates and a renewal form or, if you don't want to worry in the future about remembering to renew your subscription to *Freedom*, just ask us to send you a standing order form by emailing subs@freedompress.org.uk or you can write to us at 'Subscriptions', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. You can now renew online as well at freedompress.org.uk.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 13th March 2010 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 4th March. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

On paper, Labour's aim of having 50% of all young people going to university is a good idea. However, like all government initiatives that seem to give us something, problems become apparent as soon as you start to look at the bigger picture.

The most glaring problem is that it says nothing about the 50%-plus who won't be going to university. This is just like the effect of grammar schools, the selective schools that exist in many areas that Labour are, on paper at least, against. The problem with grammar schools isn't the schools themselves, but the effect they have on the neighbouring schools. It's wrong to call the neighbours comprehensives – they are secondary moderns but without the emphasis on practical subjects.

The other issue is of course cost. That cost has a knock-on effect. Firstly, it excludes a lot of people without any serious financial clout behind them from studying. While the culture of indebtedness that has swept the country would suggest otherwise, for many tuition fees and associated costs put people off studying.

But it also means that there have to be jobs for the newly indebted graduates to fill. There used to be teachers who weren't graduates, but the government stripped that away a few years ago. The Tories have made sounds about going further and only recruiting people with top degrees from good universities as a way of raising the prestige of the profession. This ludicrous idea is a poor substitute for better pay and less government interference, which would be the preference of most teachers I've met. It's been announced that nurses and paramedics are to go the same way – graduate entry only, though there will be a lot more learn

on-the-job opportunities. Even funeral directors now have an associated degree.

All these graduate-only jobs have come about for a reason. Supply and demand dictates that if there are a lot of graduates, you can get them for less, particularly if they've got loans to pay back. The people doing the recruiting may well have children who are recent graduates with huge debts. With some jobs attracting hundreds of applicants, qualifications are an easy way of winnowing them.

In more creative, desirable professions the wealthy are even more entrenched through the practice of only offering unpaid internships, basically unpaid work for months or even years, which only those with an independent income can do.

The equal opportunities policies the Labour Party used to be so positive about meant that you couldn't discriminate against those who were not graduates. Or indeed against graduates – as one tale I heard of in the '80s demonstrated. A council in the north advertised for four street cleaners. The only short-listing criteria were 'understanding of equal opportunities'. All four jobs went to graduates.

While there are some professions and jobs that we want to be sure people are capable of doing – and thus require a test (doctors and lorry drivers spring to mind) – most can be learnt. On the job, even. To be fair, the government have brought back a sort of apprenticeship. But qualifications do not measure people's ability to do anything other than pass exams and complete coursework.

So, saddle people with debt, or restrict their horizons. Looks like a government plan come good to me.



Spending a penny

Donald Room's response (letters, 30th January) is quite right. The happy bunny stuff of Eric Blair (19th December) typifies a wet approach to anarchism. It says we must all be friends. He misses the point. A reason for an anarchist newspaper is to argue. We need splits, factions and rivalry. The paper should be a forum of for controversy.

The editors of *Freedom* are by and large retired socialists. What they dished up is banal and is found in the capitalist press. Why bother to read it in *Freedom*? There is no anarchist interpretation. For example, much of what appears is about money: a capitalist obsession. All the stuff about strikers and workers is a load of guff. *Freedom* imagines workers eager for equal rights. They are not. They are would-be capitalists intent on making more money and maintaining differentials.

The popular media more than covers the antics of the police and army. The editors of *Freedom* tell us nothing we do not already know. Recycling this stuff simply emphasises the painful success of capitalism. Next, *Freedom* will be recycling electioneering propaganda: photographs of politicians as though we had never seen them before. *Freedom* uses banal unattributed photographs, usually without captions: pictures showing us what money looks like! The historical stuff is an endless diatribe on Kropotkin, Bakunin and Proudhon that has no relevance to the present day. *Freedom* is for diehards.

Peter Gibson

The last straw

Ian Pirie (letters, 30th January) wrote how this paper no longer represented his liberal whining politics because it printed the word 'cunt' and apparently his 'pacifist eyes' couldn't handle it – are your ears pacifist? If not, would it have been all right if someone had shouted it at you?

I've got a few problems with your argument. Cunt is part of our language, we even used to have streets named after it with the classic 'Gropcunt Lane' in Oxford and 'Grapcunt Lane' in York being favourite twelfth century prostitute working spots. And its part of our language now, and in all my years of swearing and hearing swearing, I've never heard that it used to refer to the 'cleft of venus'. Throughout the '70s the feminist movement fought against its use. I wasn't around then so I don't know if cunt actually meant 'cleft of venus' then, but I know that since I've been on this earth it sure as fuck hasn't. Instead it describes people who are muppets, arses, tossers – that sort of crowd of people – and sometimes it describes the feeling when you bang your leg or when Everton score.

People who hate the word cunt seem to hate it because they're tired of being called one or because they're middle class cunts trying to impose some sense of decency on working class men by tutting and informing them of how vulgar they are. If this does not work then they're called sexist. If a working class women is shouting about people being cunts

then they're normally just left alone by the middle class, perhaps out of fear.

And what kind of old biddy gets offended at the word cunt? The old women I know, like my nan, love a good swear. We seem to forget that for our current OAPs have lived through the sexual revolution, '68 an' all that, and punk (an all its offences). Was this women a nun? If she was a '70s radical feminist who had fought against the word being used to refer to the 'cleft of venus' then fair enough, but I would have expected her to write in to *Freedom* and call the writers cunts rather than leave you to it. This ain't the festival of light, this is ... well, this is an archaist paper.

Makhno was a great anarchist because he used to shoot people. If you can't handle people calling people cunts then how are you going to handle an article about Makhno? Oh wait, you'd hate it because you think armed insurrection is 'ludicrous'. Hopefully your revolutionary heart will be satisfied with voting for Labour with the trots and commies this election instead of moving towards a revolution.

Finally, Mr Pirie, maybe you should realise that if the word cunt offends you so much it might be because you are in fact ... a cunt.

Freedom's been doing a cracking job under its new editorship. The bookfair song was funny and made a great point about the ridiculous nature of our inward-looking movement. I'm glad the excellent editors at *Freedom* had the ability to say to the women who wrote the song 'that's fucking marvellous, that's going to be printed in our paper, can we get you a pint?' instead of them being cunts, like you.

Gawain 'the cunt' Williams
Whitechapel Anarchist Group (WAG)

Conference going ahead ... maybe

The meeting to discuss holding a London movement follow-up to the 2009 Anarchist Movement Conference on 11th February

decided to proceed with arranging the conference.

Despite a low turn-out at this meeting, as well as at the previous one, those who turned up decided that the potential benefits of a conference were too important to abandon due to the apparent apathy of others.

The group is now investigating logistical issues and will meet again on Sunday 21st February to put together a firm proposal for the conference.

There will be a further meeting on Sunday 7th March (details to be announced) to decide, once and for all, whether or not to proceed with the conference. Everyone interested in attending these meetings is encouraged to come along.

The proposal is, at this stage, to be based on a number of basic ideas:

1. That there will be a two-day conference in London in late June.
2. The conference will be for London anarchists.
3. The conference will see a mix of small discussion groups, like last year, and practical workshops on topics to be decided democratically by participants.

A June date will place the conference in the early days of a new government. The three main political parties are proposing cuts and we're likely to know some of the details by then. What will the movement do to harness the likely anger of working class people to these cuts? Can we persuade people who feel alienated from the political mainstream of the alternatives to the BNP or a new left-wing party?

Are we in a fit shape to call ourselves a movement and, if not, what's stopping us working together more effectively? Race? Gender? Class? Ideology? Pure pig-headedness? And how do we sort the issues out if we don't sit down together and talk about them?

If you're interested in getting more involved without leaving your home, you can join the email discussion list here:
http://mail.haringey.org.uk/mailman/listinfo/conference10_haringey.org.uk

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Haven Distribution

Haven Distribution, which has been a registered charity since December 2001, has been assisting prisoners since 1996 by purchasing educational books for those who wish to use their time in custody effectively, through the pursuit of lifelong learning. It seeks to encourage self-worth and raise self-esteem in inmates in the UK prison population, providing a structured service, which will assist in the resettlement of the offender back into his or her community.

Haven plays a vital role in providing books that prison libraries may not stock or have in very short supply, as prison libraries have restrictive budgets for the provision of educational books. In doing so, they can ensure that prisoners have access to essential course literature, not just for a two to three week loan, but for the duration of their respective courses. As it limits support to each inmate to £20, it further encourages applicants to leave the book(s) behind at the end of their course in order that future student-prisoners can benefit from their use.

The books are not purchased speculatively, but only in the context of each prisoner's requirements, providing effective use of funding support. Haven encourages feedback from its applicants regarding the progression of their courses and their achievements, as well as asking them to leave the books in the prison libraries for future inmates.

In late 2002, with major support from the Tudor Trust, Haven advertised its services nationally in the 158 prisons and young offender institutions. The subsequent demand has been staggering. Clearly, HM Prison Service simply cannot address the demand for educational material, despite their statutory obligation to provide educational books, dictionaries, and essential reading media to serving inmates. This is, in part, due to the growth of the prison estate.

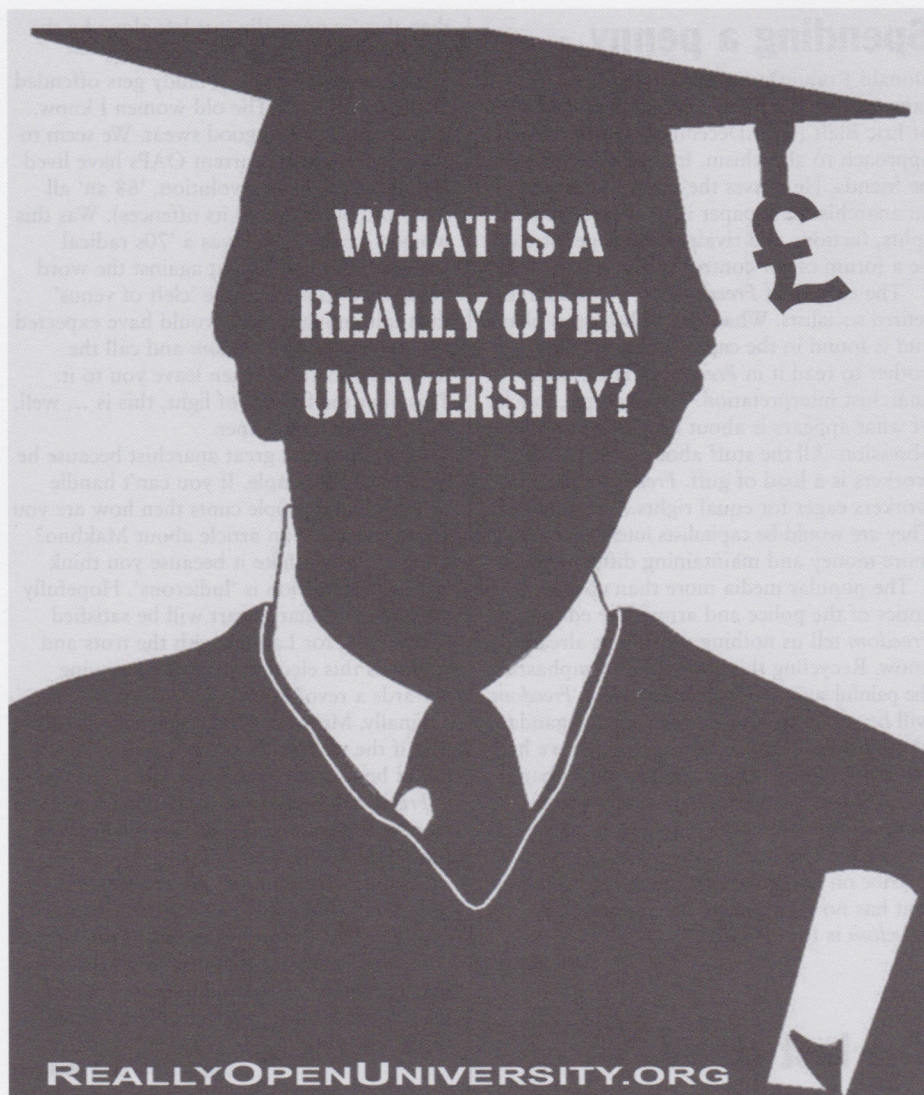
With continued support, Haven Distribution can continue to be successful in providing essential educational books for inmates who choose to use their time in custody to their advantage, and it is hoped that Haven can continue its success by assisting inmate's self-education and helping towards their resettlement in the future.

We would like to thank our volunteers and everyone who has provided us with financial support over the past 12 years:

For all enquiries about Haven Distribution's work, please contact info2009@havendistribution.org.uk or at the postal address below.

If you would like to make a donation, please check the 'Donating to Haven' page on the website to find out the many ways you can offer support.

Haven Distribution, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX



● At the University of Sussex, Brighton, 106 students took militant action and occupied the top floor of an on campus building on 8th February against the threat of compulsory staff redundancies and course cuts.

The occupiers strategically chose the conference centre room so as not to disrupt fellow students but rather to disrupt a "key part of management's strategy to run the university as a profitable business".

Despite only lasting one day, and with no overt demands being issued or met, the occupiers instead sought to highlight the ongoing financial crisis in education, and at Sussex especially, and galvanise support for the University and College Union (UCU) – the largest trade union for teachers and lecturers, who were balloting for strike action the following week.

They were also able to mobilise a 200-strong demonstration at the university who then joined the occupiers before leaving the building together.

Students on campus have been active for a while as part of the Stop the Cuts campaign which was formed in response to plans by the university administration to cut back on spending by millions in the next few years.

The university is planning to cut £3 million this academic year, and £5 million next year. Stop the Cuts: <http://defendsussex.wordpress.com/>

● Taking inspiration from the Sussex occupation, students and activists at Leeds University have established the Really Open University (ROU) in response to plans by the university administration to cut back on spending by millions in the next few years.

The university is planning to cut a massive £3 million this academic year, and a further £5 million next year, causing the loss of 700 jobs. In a record turnout of 65.8% of UCU members, 63.8% voted 'Yes' to strike action at the university.

In the run up to the ballot, Leeds Student Union ran an anti-strike campaign in which they encouraged students to harass lecturers calling on them not to strike. The ROU and 'Leeds University Against Cuts' were created to resist the cuts and fight the Student Union's stance.

On 2nd March they will be hosting an event called 'What is a Really Open University?' to encourage people to come along and help take part in a participatory process of creating one. Meet 5.30pm at the Parkinson Steps, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds. They also produce a weekly newsletter, *The Sausage Factory*, which is available to download from the website.

Really Open University: reallyopenuniversity.org/
Leeds University Against Cuts: <http://leedsuniversityagaincuts.wordpress.com/>

A tragedy in several parts

Greece is the latest in a line of countries squeezed by the ongoing financial crises which continue to ripple around the world

Greece is an important case to watch, more so than, say, Iceland or Ireland, as the situation in Greece is closer to the economic positions of the UK – both have governments who form an important part of economy, and are financially overstretched. This is not a case of irresponsible governments, not banks. However, one has to be careful that responses to such crises are not in danger of propping up the underlying capitalism.

Mainstream commentary has focused on the corruption of Greek politicians or used the opportunity to bash the Euro. Rarely is it admitted that the problem lies with the globalisation of capital itself. Greece, like most western nations in trouble, is a victim of the illusory promises of trans-national capital – the vast funds of money that come from pension, hedge and international investment funds. Its government, lured by the smell of cheap money, has borrowed heavily on international markets to run up incredible amounts of debt. 2010 government debt is expected to stand at 120% of Greece's gross domestic product (GDP). It is hardly any wonder the markets have spooked, with the result that nice cheap money is being withdrawn from the country leaving the new left-wing government unable to cover existing expenditure, let alone future promises.

Since 2001 it has only been in the financial years 2007–08 that Greece actually reduced its public debt to less than the 3%. In 2009, with a shrinking economy, it jumped to 12.7%. Despite a 4% growth rate in the years up to 2007, boosted greatly by the spending on the 2004 Olympics, unemployment and inflation remained well above the EU average.

None of this mattered, as Greece only accounted for 3% of the European Union economy. The EU was actually a major source of financial aid, to the tune of 3.3% of Greece's GDP. It propped up the desired story that the Euro was good news for peripheral economic powers such as Greece.

Effectively, Greece was receiving the tacit support of the economic superpower that is the European Economic Union through the Euro. In the good years there was no need for investors to question that Greece might be anything other than the slightly errant younger brother in the European family.

So borrowing money from the international markets was not that hard for the Greek government. With 40% of GDP coming from government spending, it needed it. Like with



Prices on display at the Athens stock market recently

the UK – and there are important similarities between the UK and Greek financial systems – and many of the other financially crumbling nations, growth, it turns out, has been largely funded by debt.

The deflation of the western credit boom has not come to an end. Debt-laden nations rather than banks are those now the facing the firing line. And previous Greek governments have been depending on such credit to such an extent that the only option has been to go bust.

There are two factors of international capitalism at play here. Firstly, there are the existing funds from where Greece sourced the money to plug holes in its budget in previous years. In the light of the financial troubles in other countries, investors began scrutinising every country. It has been fairly obvious that Greece is the weakest link in the European Union with its open flouting of rules.

Already risk adverse, they began pulling their money out with the result that Greek government debt bonds fell in price. Once a downward spiral begins then it picks up momentum as more and more investors follow suit.

In a downward market like this one, raising new debt is very difficult. Greece has got to the point where it was becoming ever more expensive, if not impossible. Those who lend to countries which are essentially bankrupt charge higher interest rates for the risk.

The second effect is the sharks are now circling. Where there is weakness then there is the potential for profit through short selling. What is happening at the moment is a repeat of what happened when George

Soros forced Sterling out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in the 1992. By altering the market place itself through enormous speculations, sharks in the financial world are attempting to force a profitable crisis in the Euro by striking through Greece (there is an \$8bn bet the Euro will fall in price because of Greece). This is why there has been so much emphasis on whether Berlin and Paris will back a bail out of the Greek debts. It is fair to say that Europe is pretty angry.

Euro-sceptics point out that the traditional way out for countries in this situation is to devalue the currency, so reducing the amount of debt owed. The Euro-zone does not have this option. This is an argument in favour of local currencies allowing smaller zones to respond more effectively to their needs rather than being put at the mercy of global forces who do not care about the effect on the ground.

However, where ever the solution comes from what matters is that Greece's government is in hock to foreign creditors and needs their good will. The only way it can regain it is by convincing them it has changed its profligate ways.

That means the end of spurious budgets and overspending, and much greater scrutiny. Its partners in the European Union are finally likely to enforce this as the result has been to draw attention to all the other EU nations suffering similar financial ill-health. The financial sharks are asking the question whether, even if Greece is bailed out, there are the funds to help bigger states such as Spain or Italy. The UK's position is similarly shaky

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

28th Screening of *Cruel and Unusual* at the 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, at 5.30pm, see 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/ 2010/02/28/

MARCH

2nd The first London Anarchist Studies Network social, from 7pm at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX – an opportunity for anarchist students, researchers and anarchist academics living, working or visiting the capital to meet, talk and socialise. Bring a bottle and get yourself down there.

6th March for Jobs, join Brighton Solidarity Federation in the radical workers bloc, meet 12 noon at The Level, Brighton BN1 4JA, for more details see brightonsolfed.org.uk

7th Screening of *Everything's Cool* at The Common Place, Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, at 7pm, see thecommonplace.org.uk/events-calendar/day.listevents/2010/03/07/

7th Seedy Sunday – seed swap at Foxton Village Hall, Leicestershire LE16 7RE from 2pm until 4.30pm, for more see foxtonseedsunday.org.uk

14th Screening of *Everything's Cool* at the 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, at 5.30pm, see everythingscool.org and 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/2010/03/14/

21st Bristol Seed Swap, with stalls, workshops, tea, cakes and more, at Windmill Hill City Farm, Philip Street, Bedminster, Bristol BS3 4EA from 11am until 4pm, see seedysunday.org or contact bristolseedswap@yahoo.co.uk

21st Screening of *Reformat the Planet* at The Common Place, Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, at 7pm, see 2playerproductions.com and thecommonplace.org.uk/events-calendar/day.listevents/2010/03/21/

26th to 28th The Sixth Anarchist Bookfair in Zagreb, for more see ask-zagreb.org or email anarhisticki.sajam.knjiga@gmail.com

27th Campaign Against the Arms Trade gathering, your chance to meet supporters of CAAT and get involved, at 15 Priory Street, York YO1 6ET from 10.30am until 5pm, see caat.org.uk or contact 020 7281 0297 or email rhiannon@caat.org.uk

28th Screening of *Reformat the Planet* at the 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, at 5.30pm, see 2playerproductions.com and 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/2010/03/28/

APRIL

10th Bradford Anarchist Bookfair at the 1in12 Club 21-23 Albion Street Bradford West Yorkshire BD1 2LY from 10am until 4pm, for details or to book a stall contact sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk

17th The ninth Anarchist Bookfair in Ghent at 'De Centrale', Kraankinderstraat 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium, from 10am until 8pm, for more details or to book a stall email aboekenbeurs@yahoo.com or see www.aboekenbeurs.be

FILM

Same Shit Different Day

directed by Greg Hall

Well, I went to my second ever film premiere last night at the Genesis cinema in the Mile End Road to see the much anticipated *Same Shit Different Day* by Greg Hall (pictured right). The red carpet was not in evidence, but august luminaries from the Whitechapel Anarchist Group were soon crowding the bar.

The film is Greg's third – not bad for a young sprig of a lad – and dependent on the success of *SSDD* will be whether Greg is able to raise enough dough to turn *Bash The Rich* into his next film.

I am well happy to report that on a total budget of only £10,000 Greg has turned in another stunner which should surpass even his earlier success with *The Plague*.

The extended scene in the Working Man's Club in Hackney – with a must see soliloquy on Conan The Barbarian – reminded me of the brilliant last scene in *Boys From The Blackstuff*. I can give no higher praise and Greg was given a well deserved ovation before modestly returning to the bar.

Watch out for a cryptic reference to supergrass Paul Ross and a cunning piece of product placement! Greg now has to promote the film in private views and film festivals. but hopefully it will get a well deserved release soon.

Ian Bone



PAMPHLET



After Makhno: Hidden histories of Anarchism in the Ukraine

published by
Kate Sharpley
Library, £2

This brief pamphlet was a real eye-opener to me. It tells two tales, one of the anarchist underground in Ukraine in the

1920s and 1930s and one of the fate of one anarchist, Varshavskiy, and the handwritten leaflet he produced to protest Soviet double standards over the Sacco and Vanzetti case.

For a long time, we have been told that the story of anarchism in the Soviet Union ended in 1921. This gives a lively riposte.

The anarchists in Soviet Ukraine weren't able to achieve much, but they kept going despite Bolshevik repression. Their memories, recovered by modern historians, deserve to be preserved.

Martin H

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Herbert Spencer.
2. Margaret Thatcher, who used it to argue that neo-liberal capitalism was the only possible way of ordering things.
3. A satirical 'award' for people "who do humanity a service by removing themselves from the gene pool". There are five requirements: inability to reproduce (by death or sterilisation);

- astoundingly stupid judgement; the cause of one's own demise; capable of sound judgement; and the event must be verified. See darwinawards.com/
4. As the King who ate himself to death. His last meal consisted of lobster, caviar, sauerkraut, kippers and champagne, followed by 14 helpings of semla, a lenten pastry dessert served in milk.

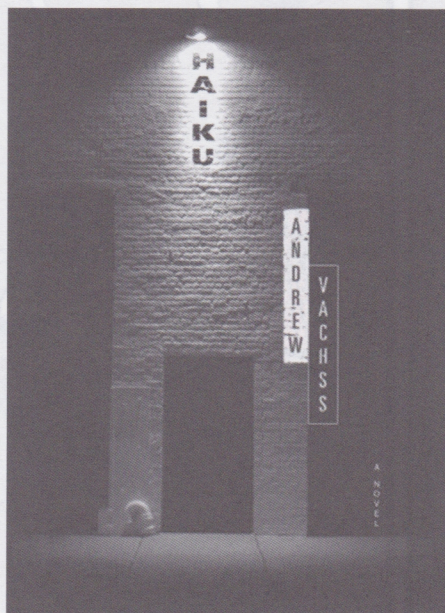
Collective fictions

Tom Jennings finds much of interest, as well as inevitable limitations, in two American novels exploring positive world views among the impoverished

While hard-boiled fiction always foregrounded class conflict, it typically dramatises a cynically heroic, ruggedly individualistic 'little man' struggling against modern society's overwhelming institutional machines – the macho solipsism captured by the characterisations 'private-dick' and 'private-eye' essentially reproducing capitalist ideology and valorising petit-bourgeois social Darwinism. Contemporary noir revisionists generally faithfully follow Chandler and Hammett's templates, tinged with progressive motifs but neglecting the potential of collective action. However, two prominent authors who consistently test generic conventions have recently published books with explicitly social and community-based visions meditating on the pragmatic development of grass-roots philosophy and its application to pressing needs among the poor and oppressed: *Haiku* by Andrew Vachss (Vintage 2009) and *The Right Mistake* by Walter Mosley (Basic Civitas, 2008).

Haiku's events are recounted from the point of view of Ho, a Japanese former kung-fu sensei who dropped out after blaming himself for a favoured disciple's murder. Living on the Big Apple streets in a spartan search for purpose, his calm non-judgmental trustworthiness attracts a loose bunch of fellow homeless precipitated there by various misfortunes magnifying their own personality tragedies. As the alcoholic ex-gangster poet, psychopathic Vietnam veteran, obsessive-compulsive schizophrenic, manically gambling ex-stockbroker and idiot-savant autistic are unobtrusively nurtured by Ho's caring clarity of comprehension and conduct, their dovetailing needinesses and capabilities gradually allow fractious conviviality to formulate a project transcending the hitherto all-consuming sustenance of bare life as and from the 'rubbish' that mainstream society discards. The plan's success signals the possibility of surviving and thriving, while also fulfilling Ho's quest – turning out, in effect, to render redundant his presumed role of privileged teacher.

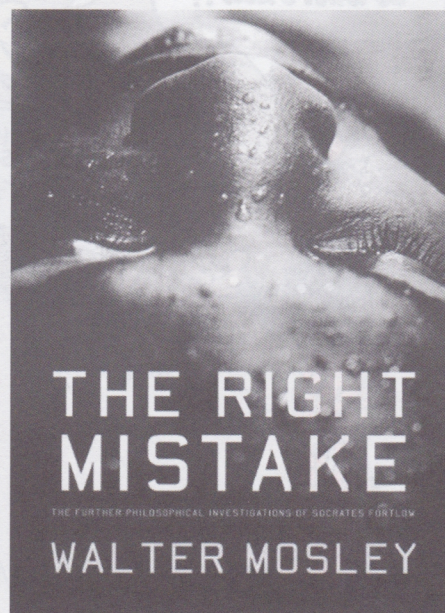
One impetus for this focus was the shameful municipal policy of systematically starving welfare services, trumped by NY mayor Guiliani's 'zero tolerance' of the poor's visibility near valuable real-estate. Whereas the damaged life-histories of the novel's cast quite clearly reflect those of everyone – but for random twists of fate – when the hypocrisies of respectability are stripped away which otherwise facilitate disavowal of fears and hatreds,



attributed instead to criminals, demons and other subhuman elements. The author rhetorically insists that true moral nobility and humanity, inextricably bound up with inadequacy, nevertheless reside here – with the salvaging of Brewster's pulp-fiction library metaphorically cherishing the accumulated counter-knowledge of the lower-classes. Yet, sadly – though we wouldn't wish them continued destitution – the destiny of this tribe's collective strength is merely fragmented re-integration into polite society. Worse, on the latter's terms, with the transition midwived by selfless social workers – albeit those forging rogue practices flouting prevailing prescriptions. Perhaps unintentionally, then, the best these dispossessed can expect is holding liberal democracy to its dishonest promises.

The Philosophy of Poverty

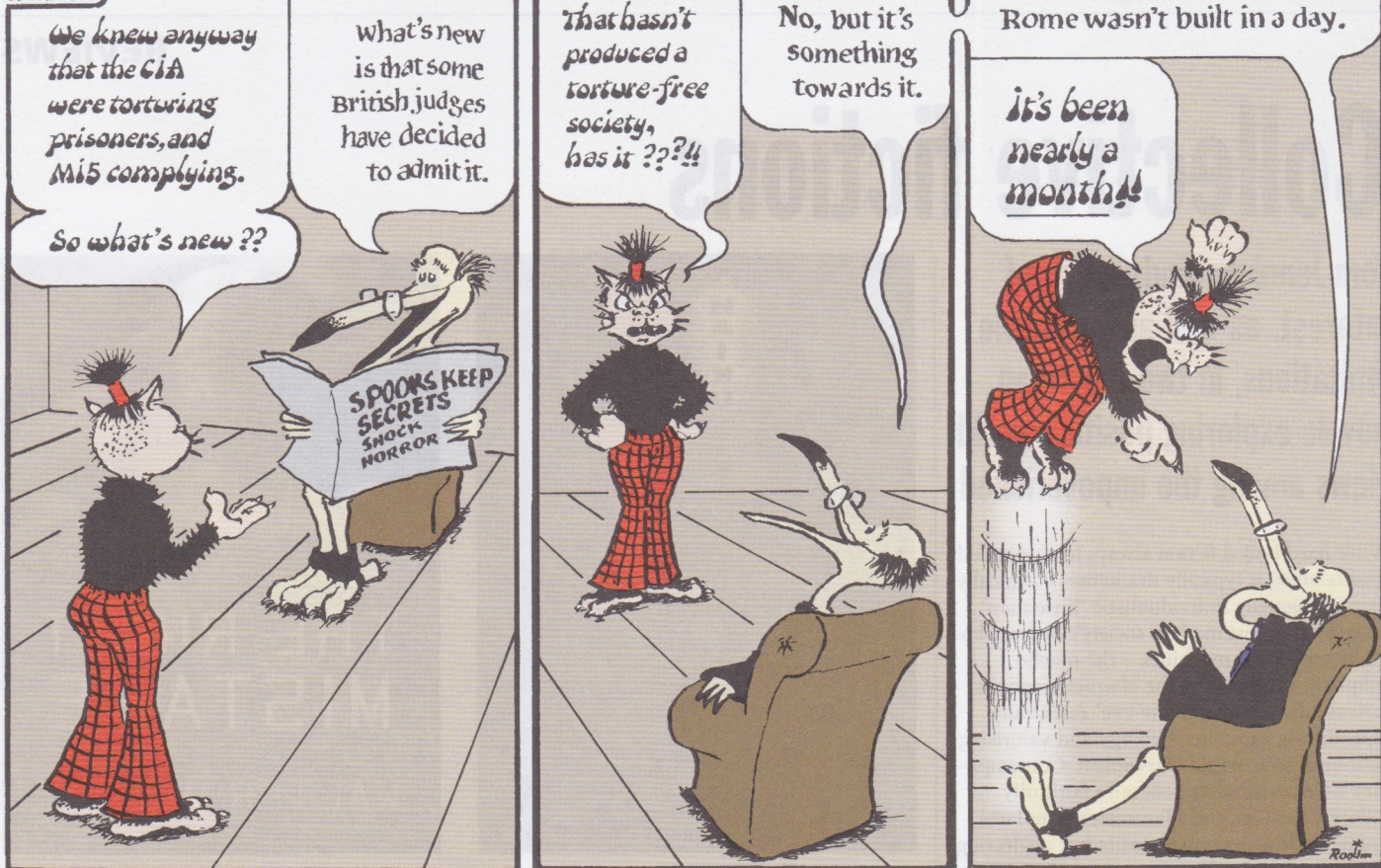
As with Vachss' Burke saga (closing instalment reviewed in *Freedom*, 10th October 2009), Walter Mosley is best known for his crime series starring Easy Rawlins. *The Right Mistake* is itself the third collection of 'The Philosophical Investigations of Socrates Fortlow' – short stories with an episodic rather than linear narrative thrust introduced in *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* (1997) and *Walkin' the Dog* (2000). Now, after spending half his life in jail for rape and murder, ten trying years later sees Socrates, aged 60, with an LA toehold, tiny apartment and drudge job. His neighbourhood standing rests on not only imposing physical stature and prowess, but a resolutely thoughtful and questioning demeanour – arising from anguish over past evils culminating in age-old philosophical ruminations concerning honour and moral conduct – apt for troubleshooting and arbitrating conflicts afflicting those near and dear. His intuitive self-taught ethical commitment infects others – an impressive,



if unexpected, outcome leading him to institute a weekly grass-roots debating chamber, the Thinker's Club.

In its volunteer-run space, the Big Nickel, a representative sample of diversely reputable friends and neighbours – including a carpenter, gambler, rag-and-bone dealer, musician, drug-gang lieutenant, lawyer and martial arts tutor – mull over the meaning of life with respect to immediate mutual community problems, without recourse to higher powers, authorities or conceptual frameworks. Gradually, self-organised offshoot initiatives tackling concrete issues attract deeper and wider attention and involvement, along with righteous admiration, ire and interference – respectively from those appreciating the practical social, cultural and political potential, compared to others whose less philanthropic control, influence and investment are exposed by genuinely autonomous organisation. Police, church, media and bureaucratic attacks are warded off with combinations of solidarity, fortitude and fortuitous circumstance, while previously twisted and torturous personal and family relationships may heal and nurture once again – the seeds of hope seemingly sown in the ghetto's unpromising soil.

But notwithstanding a necessarily strong rooting in critical and self-critical practise and inspiration, the success of Socrates' brainchild seems painted in an excessively rosy glow. As with *Haiku's* bundled psychopathologies, differences of agenda, capacity and constitution may not be so readily resolved – however generous the goodwill – and internal and infernal frictions, factions and fractures surely pose greater basic threats. Moreover, even absencing a dialectical sensitivity, some measure of traumatic failure would be invaluablely instructive, not to mention realistic, in a dynamic of collective



Review

◀ page 15

development that didn't ultimately depend on the superhuman qualities of charismatic individuals – even when traditional leadership is avoided, as in these narratives. If the crucial human strengths and weaknesses, in short, exist between as much as within individuals, then preoccupations with egoistic redemption may not be terribly useful.

Of course, in addition to the demands and expectations of crime fiction, these authors work with the scripts and discourses that produced and modulate their expressive identities. Mosley acknowledges that his writing pays tribute to the trials and tribulations of his own parents' civil rights generation, deploying the idealism and insights of succeed-

ing post-sixties cohorts in articulating African-American experience. Vachss exhibits a comparably refreshing emphasis on elective family and identity-in-action – perhaps more clearly responding to contemporary post-industrial, postmodern fragmentation, even if here refracted through a prism of ersatz Taoist existentialism. Both also highlight the central determination of class structure and process in simultaneously prompting and spoiling progressive change – so if these particular visions of present prospects fail to completely convince and satisfy, well, neither do any others this reader has seen. Furthermore such skilful, forthright attempts are regrettably very rare, thus representing valuable contributions to our own evolving understandings.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

<http://libcom.org/blog/4271>

THE QUIZ

1. Which nineteenth century philosopher, regarded as an anarchist by some, coined the phrase 'There is No Alternative'?
2. With whom is the phrase 'There is No Alternative' most associated with now?
3. What are the Darwin Awards?
4. How is King Adolf Frederick remembered in Sweden?

Answers on page 14

The Anarchist Quiz Book compiled by Martin Howard with illustrations by Paul Petard is available for just £5 (post free) from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX or you can order online at freedompress.org.uk.

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John Rety ... 'The point is this'

ng rumours, there is that John was a *Freedom* Neil Collins, who helped week in the mid-1960s, "ebullience" fondly. Class one paid this affectionate y was the first anarchist I ore directly responsible for he was the best editor of rement has suffered a sad onest, funny, steadfast died."

now a distinguished he 1960s part of the s Federation and the ist Group, both highly . He recalls: "When John editors [of *Freedom*] he ite a column, which I did hs (from the autumn of of 1969)." Called 'Fifth ave Hicks "a licence to be agree with what other rs wrote)". This inclusive rk of *Freedom* under John's was the least sectarian st: he just couldn't see the as that seemed so important

eff Cloves recalls *Freedom* e" and being "less puri- s editorship – "contributors he was quite liberal about

with Ian Bone, John : "I just printed everything

land and other places, of *Freedom* to take he paper: "The Scottish e once every month, it

ho was involved with ough the 1990s, remembers eal anarchist – he didn't ings, he also got out there; rent to, John was there."

activist Ernest Rodker says memory, even after so many "in heroic mode", being burst through the heavy ounding Grosvenor ous anti-Vietnam War he US Embassy on 27th

Bash The Rich, Ian Bone ore the demonstration: was the editor of *Freedom* debating with Tariq Ali to the Embassy and not ark... The room was ty looked an especially th his beard and red and He was the only anarchist



John Rety; below left, reading at Torriano in 2008; below right, at Speakers' Corner in the 1980s.

anyone had heard of and gave Ali a good sneering run for his money."

John was prominent in the anarchist movement at that time – he appeared on television at least once as 'an anarchist', and he was the prime organiser of the Anarchist Ball in Fulham Town Hall on 1st April 1966.

Asked about the Grosvenor Square demonstration, which became a fierce physical confrontation with the police. John once said: "I'm not terribly fond of violence. I think that violence means that we have lost the argument." He chose instead to focus on an event in nearby Speakers' Corner, a 13-person 13-day fast to end the Vietnam War that he participated in.

John was involved in Speakers' Corner in the 1960s, and, briefly, in the 1980s. Philip Sansom described John in his 1977 essay on Speakers' Corner as "practically the last of the [London Anarchist] 'group' speakers", noting that John was "an amusing speaker with whom the crowd felt it easy to relate".

One of John's less amusing commitments during the 1960s was his role in defending Stuart Christie, who was arrested in Spain in August 1964 carrying explosives for an attempted assassination of Franco, Fascist dictator of Spain. After an international solidarity campaign, Christie was released in September 1967 (but his accomplice Fernando Carballo Blanco was not). John was a driving force in the Christie-Carballo committee, initially convinced by Christie's protestations of innocence. Later, in his long elegiac poem 'Song of Anarchy', John wrote: "That was the day my friend went to Spain, / Love and peace, I said and patience / Look around you, this is our world / Be patient, trust in your comrades / Do nothing in secret conclaves / Anarchists have no secrets / His young face

was a grin from ear to ear / Trust me John and he sang me a song / And I never felt so cheated so betrayed / It took me ten years to drop out / But drop out I did."

Despite his personal feelings after learning the truth, John was a committed campaigner for Christie's release. John Pilgrim, press officer for the Christie-Carballo committee, recalls: "Rety said he was going off to the *Observer*. He was one of the scruffiest people I'd ever seen. The fact is he got the best coverage of the lot, a two-page spread." Christie credits the British press coverage as a major factor in his release.

In the 1960s, John was also passionately campaigning against French nuclear tests in the Pacific, hence the publication of the Freedom-connected pamphlet *Liberty, Equality & Radioactivity*, with a lovely cover by Arthur Moyse. This 1966 pamphlet drew together contributions from a variety of political perspectives including the Independent Labour Party. The contributors' section states: "Jack Robinson and John Rety are editors of *Freedom*."

A 10th June 1966 invoice for the cover is still among John's papers (this is actually the only way of dating the pamphlet). Also among John's papers are many letters from actual or potential contributors to *Freedom* discussing articles or columns that John had published or might publish.

It is clear that John was indeed one of the editors of *Freedom*, along with Jack Robinson and Pete Turner, probably from 1964 to 1969, as he himself recalled.

John had initially been invited to join the editorial group (by Philip Sansom) on the basis of his journalistic experience. Interestingly, "Nobody asked me if I knew anything about anarchism".

Later, in the 1990s, *Freedom*, writing a column 'The Anarchist Press' (published by Freedom Press in 1997).

The poet

In the interval between with *Freedom*, chess and central parts of John's life. Rating this century was chess for England several European Senior Team

John's involvement in after he turned from sup becoming one himself, t derelict building at 99 T Kentish Town, in 1981. without gas or electricity transformed into an extr arts centre. Torriano M base for Hearing Eye pu which John and his life Susan Johns, have publi books, many of them ill daughter Emily Johns, fe

